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Tranquilizer Gun Fine Idea But-Say Police

NEW YORK (AP)—Why not a gun - fired tranquilizer for use on rioters or fleeing criminals instead of bullets?

A fine idea, police spokesmen in major U.S. cities say.

But, they agree, until a tranquilizer that works instantly is developed — with a no-kill guarantee—police will have to continue using present - day weapons.

The suggestion that wrongdoers could be brought down by tranquilizers came from Charles A. O'Brien, Chief Deputy Attorney General of California.

O'Brien noted that three days of rioting in San Francisco followed the fatal shooting of a Negro car theft suspect recently and said capture by tranquilizer could have prevented the costly disturbance.

'A Long Way Off'

"It's a nice idea, but it's a long way off," was the view of Sgt. Edward J. Higgins, firearms specialist for the Massachusetts State Police.

Higgins agreed that tranquilizer darts fired from guns had proved effective in dealing with animals, but said their use on thinner-skinned humans might prove lethal. He pointed out the risk that a tranquilizing hypodermic shot into a man would cause an air embolism, the often-fatal obstruction of an artery by a bubble of air.

A spokesman said New York City police had experimented with tranquilizer missiles along lines suggested by O'Brien but had concluded that they would not work quickly enough in a real emergency.

"The tranquilizer shots take several minutes to become effective," the spokesman said. "During that period, the person being tranquilized could

do a lot of harm with a knife or gun."

A Los Angeles police official said the idea "has been kicked around unofficially here" but commented:

"The problem is that nobody knows the right dosage, or how to prevent a possibly fatal reaction. You read all the time of zoo people killing animals with an accidental overdose or adverse reaction. How would you dare try it on humans?"

"And what do you do if the suspect has a gun and shoots back with real bullets when you fire a tranquilizer?"

Police Chief L. H. Caylor of Dayton, Ohio, scene of a recent racial disturbance, doubted that tranquilizer missiles would be effective against rioters.

"The main problem in a big outbreak is clearing the streets, and you couldn't do that with tranquilizers," Caylor said. "A shotgun with a bayonet on it is probably the most effective crowd-clearer because of the psychological effect."

Chicago Reaction

Capt. John Mulchrone, head of the Police Department Anti-Riot Force in Chicago—swept by three racial outbreaks this year — said O'Brien's idea "might be worth looking into."

In general, however, Mulchrone said the Chicago police had found a show of pistols, clubs and sheer muscle to be most effective in minimizing mass misbehavior.

Police Chief Richard Wagner of Cleveland, where four were killed in a riot in July, said he would prefer a quick-acting, sleep-inducing gas to tranquilizer missiles.

"If a tranquilizer dart should hit an artery or other vital spot it could be fatal," Wagner said.